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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 004654

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SUBJECT: THE MAKING OF THE SHADOW PRESIDENT?

REF: A. MEXICO 4465

[1](#)B. MEXICO 4567

Classified By: DCM LESLIE A. BASSETT, REASONS: 1.4(B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Several leading Mexican political observers largely concurred that the evolution of the current political stalemate would continue to be largely a function of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's (AMLO) personality. They believed that his manner of thinking was so rigid and self-righteous that he would never be able to admit defeat, even to himself.

At the same time, his powerful charisma ensured that he would never lack for a core of supporters willing to follow him "to the final consequences." They suspected -- and recent press reports increasingly corroborate -- that he planned to institutionalize his protest movement following the electoral tribunal's expected certification of Felipe Calderon as President, perhaps setting up a "shadow government" that would seek to dog Calderon at every turn. The significance of this movement may well depend upon how the PRD responds to the challenge posed by AMLO's tactics and whether party pragmatists or AMLO partisans prevail. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) This is the second in a two cable series on how leading Mexican analysts see the current political conflict evolving (ref A). Over the past week, poloff met with three leading observers of the Mexican political scene, Luis Rubio of the CIDAC thinktank; freelance historian Alejandra Lajous, the author of a book on Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's (AMLO) tenure as Mexico City Mayor; and Carlos Casillas Ortega, a professor at Mexico's Anahuac and Iberoamerican universities and an advisor to PRI Senator Enrique Jackson. They concurred that the current stalemate was to a large degree a function of AMLO's personality, in particular, his rigid, self-righteous way of thinking, which excluded the possibility of compromise, and his tremendous charisma, which guaranteed that he would never lack for a core of dedicated followers.

Getting into AMLO's Head

[1](#)3. (C) AMLO's biographer, Alejandra Lajous, emphasized the importance of understanding his personality as a prerequisite to understanding his political tactics. She described him as being insular in his views, utterly convinced of his correctness, and unwilling to expose himself to potential critics. She had no doubt he truly believed he had been cheated out of an election victory, even if the evidence of fraud offered to date had been unconvincing. She believed that during the campaign, his hermetic campaign structure probably kept him far removed from negative news during the

campaign and that up until the election, he continued to believe PRD-sponsored polls reportedly showing him as many as ten points ahead, even while neutral polls showed he and Felipe Calderon in a statistical dead-heat. She believed that he had made such a huge personal investment both in his presidential campaign and in the current protest movement that "his emotional structure would never permit him to admit defeat."

14. (C) Lajous warned that AMLO was extremely manipulative and willing to betray long time allies and supporters in order to advance "his cause." She noted, for example, that when AMLO first decided to ask his supporters to occupy Mexico City's Zocalo and Paseo de la Reforma at a July 29 "informational assembly," he did not tell Mexico City Mayor Alejandro Encinas (PRD) of his plans until 15 minutes before he announced them publicly, in order to prevent Encinas from taking any measures to thwart him. Rubio told us that all last week, Encinas had been requesting a meeting with AMLO, presumably to discuss the protests. AMLO reportedly ignored Encinas's repeated entreaties, notwithstanding that it was Encinas who was paying by far the highest political price for AMLO's tactics.

15. (C) Lajous said that AMLO's personal charisma should not be underestimated as a factor in maintaining his movement, and she expected his hard-core supporters to stay with him until the bitter end. To illustrate his charisma, she said the director of a television news program told her that whenever he sent a journalist to cover AMLO for an extended period during the campaign, that journalist ended up becoming a "believer," no matter how cynical his initial views about AMLO.

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The Shadow President-Elect

16. (C) Given AMLO's absolute conviction that he won the election -- and that his cause is the right cause for Mexico -- she sees little likelihood that he will stand down in the near future. She predicted he might try to position himself as a "shadow president," reminding Mexicans of his "claim" to Los Pinos, serving as a constant critic of Calderon's policies, and mobilizing opposition to Calderon's "rightist" reforms. Indeed, he has hinted at the possibility of forming a "shadow government;" Casillas believes he would use such a ploy to undermine Calderon's initiatives at every turn.

17. (C) Both Lajous and Rubio doubted that AMLO would initiate violence, with Rubio observing that while AMLO had led other lengthy protest movements in the past, he had always eschewed violence. Lajous noted, however, that whether or not AMLO sought to initiate violence, the mobilization of large numbers of supporters inevitably could produce violent confrontations with the authorities, an observation borne out by the subsequent clash between security forces and AMLO supporters outside the Congress (ref B).

Taking It to the Streets

18. (C) Both Rubio and Lajous concurred with the other analysts we have spoken to recently that many of the long-term protesters now on the streets are PRD "clients" such as unlicensed taxi drivers and members of radicalized unions. Rubio reported that GOM security officials had told him they had information indicating that among the more mainstream protesters were members of at least two radical groups, the Frente Pancho Villa and the Peoples' Revolutionary Army (EPR). He added that there were rumors that Mexican oligarch Carlos Slim had paid protest organizers what amounted to protection money to ensure that his commercial interests would not be targeted. Both concurred

that the encampments had become more of a media spectacle than an actual occupation, with many of the tents now unoccupied overnight, and that AMLO's tactics had already alienated many of the moderates who had voted for him.

A Party of Revolution or Evolution?

¶9. (C) Rubio believed that the short-term future of AMLO's protest movement would depend in large measure on how the divisions within the PRD over his tactics played out. He explained that as a party, the PRD had not yet decided whether it stood for revolution or institutionalism; Lajous contended that ironically, some of the party's long-term members resent the radical tactics of defectors from the PRI, for fear such tactics are undermining the credibility of Mexico's institutional left, which they had worked for decades to establish. Rubio said that assuming the TEPJF certifies Calderon as President, it will fall largely to PRD President Leonel Cota to decide the extent to which the PRD will continue to back AMLO in his long-term strategy of protests. Although the party as an institution had little to gain from such tactics, Rubio noted that Cota was close to AMLO and might find it difficult to distance himself.

The Road Ahead

¶10. (C) Rubio opined that although Calderon would likely face a very difficult scenario upon taking office, the situation was salvageable. He said that the most important early action for Calderon would be to choose a very competent, experienced and broad-based cabinet, rather than one focused on "hard-core" PANistas, as many in his party would pressure him to do. In addition to sending a signal of conciliation, he believes that such a cabinet could contribute significantly to Mexico's governability and undermine expected PRD efforts at obstructionism. For her part, Lajous explained that notwithstanding the damage he was doing, AMLO had made one very important contribution, focusing the Mexican political debate on the twin issues of poverty and inequality, an issue Calderon will need to tackle head-on.

Comment: Partisans vs. Pragmatists

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¶11. (C) The implication of Lajous's and Rubio's analysis is that AMLO's future strategy is predictable: fueled by a sense of injustice -- even if ill-founded -- and buttressed by a core of true believers, he will not voluntarily wind down his campaign of protests any time soon. Yet while AMLO's strategy may be a constant, one key variable is his party's response. AMLO has done a surprisingly good job of maintaining unity to date, even as most observers believe his tactics are taking a considerable toll on the party. Most analysts suspect there are significant internal differences within the PRD over his tactics, and the degree to which the party should continue to support them. Once the electoral tribunal issues its final ruling, these differences may be amplified, as the interests of AMLO and his partisans diverge from those of PRD office holders. It remains to be seen whether even a political operator as skilled as AMLO is capable of ensuring that all eyes in the PRD remain focused on the same prize.

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